

# Northumbria Research Link

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# Northumbria Research Link

**McDowell, L. (2006) 'Creativity? Is that what they're after? Student experiences of assessment', Learning & Teaching Conference 2006 : Creativity in assessment – rethinking assessment to enrich the learning experience. London South Bank University 18 January.**

This paper was originally presented at London South Bank University, 2006.

The background features three large, overlapping, hand-drawn style swirls in purple, green, and blue. Scattered throughout are several yellow starburst shapes of varying sizes, some pointing towards the center and others towards the edges.

# **Creativity?**

***Is that* what they're  
after?**



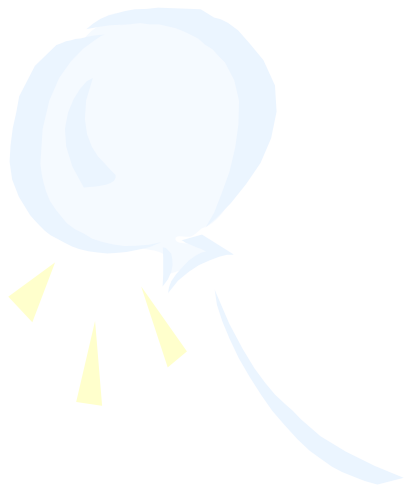
Creativity to go ...

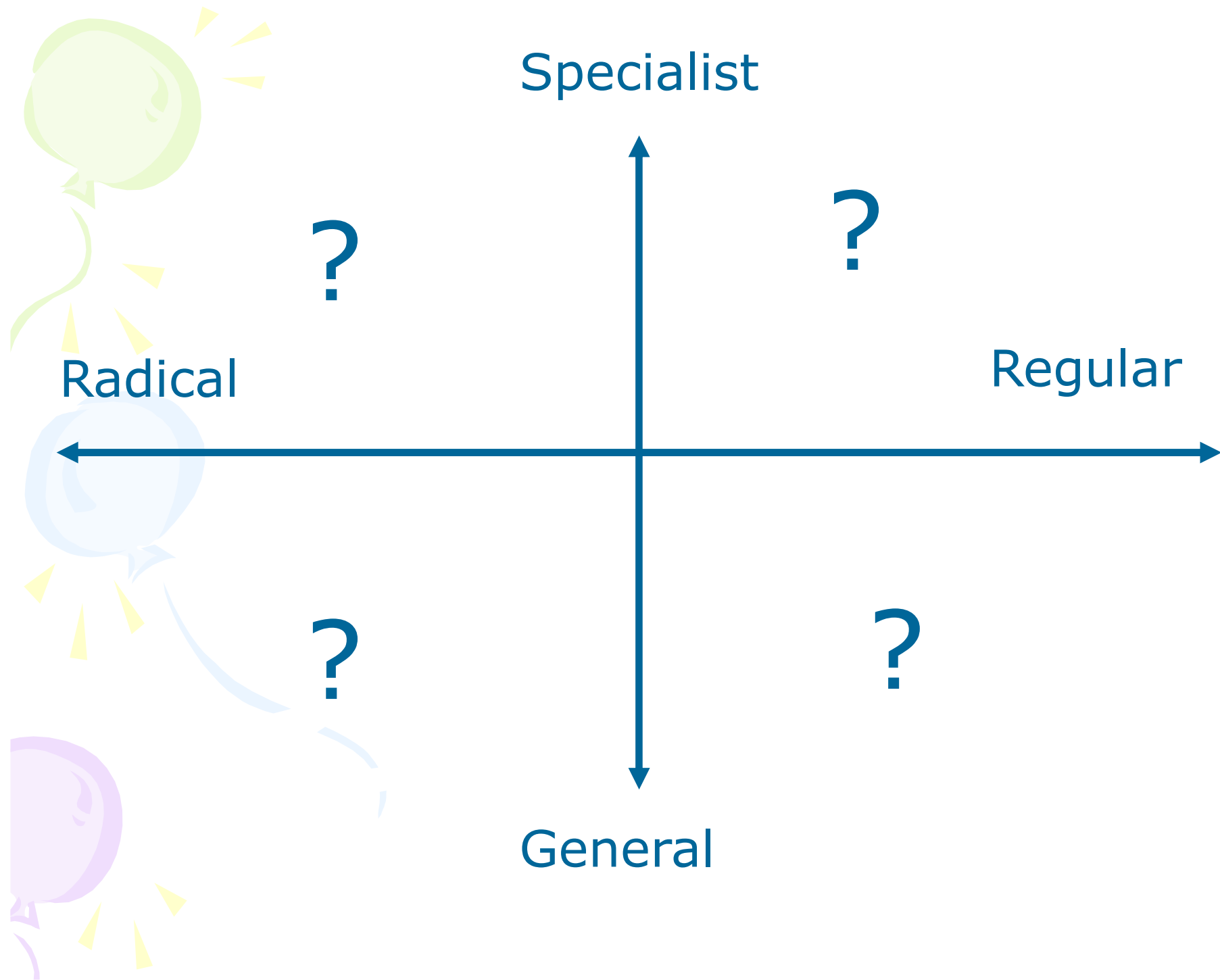
...Radical ?

...Regular ?

...Specialist ?

...General ?









# Creativity and learning

- Exploring ideas
- Gaining insights
- Being flexible & taking risks
- Giving it your personal 'stamp'
- Engagement
- Commitment



# Why don't we get creativity?

Assessment as a barrier.

Jackson et al (2005)





# What motivates us to be creative?

- Stimulation
- Connection
- Solving problems

Franken (1994)



What students say ...



.... about the assessment routine




Assessment is

“It’s straightforward ... this is the question and this is the answer”



“Essays, exams and so on are just not relevant to real life. The questions are so precise. You’re never going to need to know that kind of useless information”





... you just have to deal with it really,  
grit your teeth and just churn out  
stuff, but I find that a waste of time

... in lectures, you've got all the  
information, you're writing it down,  
and then you forget all about it ...  
until it comes to revising



What students say ...



.... about connection





“It just goes into a black hole,  
no one actually sees it and you  
can forget about it”

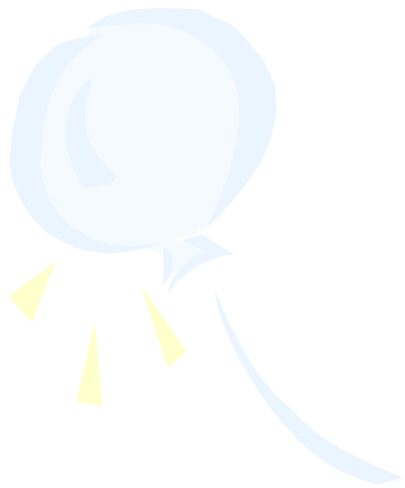


“With an essay all you have to  
do is go to the library, look up  
the relevant books and just  
copy down the relevant  
chapters in a different  
language”





“You think – let me remember this for the couple of hours – then you don’t care”



“we had to just give the teachers what they wanted to hear and it wasn’t actually about what you thought at all”






What students say ...



.... about problem solving







“It’s a case of mechanically  
going through a procedure  
that you learn by rote”



# Stimulation

Variation from routine

Something new

Something that stimulates  
interest and engagement



Variation from routine

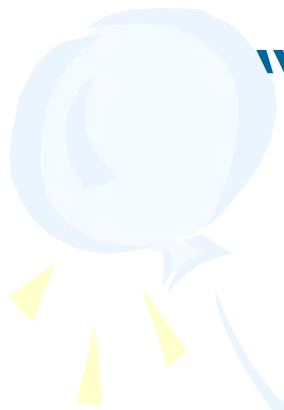


“It’s just a break – a change  
from normal”





Something new



"... much better than set pieces of coursework that have been answered a thousand times before"





## Interest and engagement

“With this project, you’ve got to put it into practice because you’re building something ... it’s much better than sitting at the back of a lecture room, twiddling your thumbs”



# Connection

Having something to say



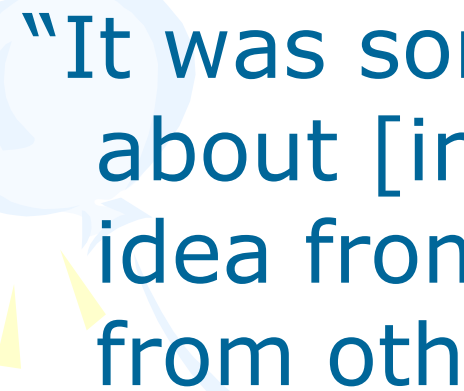
Having an audience



Interaction

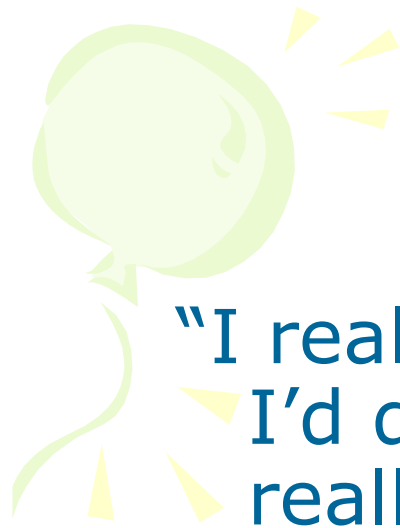


Having something to say



“It was something I wanted to talk about [in an essay] ... it could be an idea from personal experience or from other modules”





"I really felt it was totally my own work ...  
I'd done all this research so I felt like I  
really wanted it to go well and needed it to  
go well"



"You're choosing a topic rather than it being  
set in stone already, and you may have  
had personal experience with that theme  
and so you can put that in and have more  
grounds for making your own opinions"








Having an audience




“I’ve chosen a topic that will appeal ...  
people can relate to it I think”



“when you’re telling other people  
you’ve got to put it in a way so that  
they can understand ... I actually  
really enjoyed doing that”



## Interaction



“presenting your ideas for your essay and getting feedback from the class and from the lecturer that can improve [it] ... I found that helped enormously”



“if we’re doing something similar ... like ‘identity’ which this year we have been, [we] really have long discussions”



# Problem-solving

Problems not puzzles



Wanting to solve problems


Support



Collaboration



Problems not puzzles

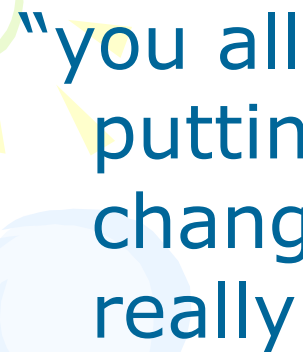


“ you're given a task to do and it's up to you to just get on and do it”

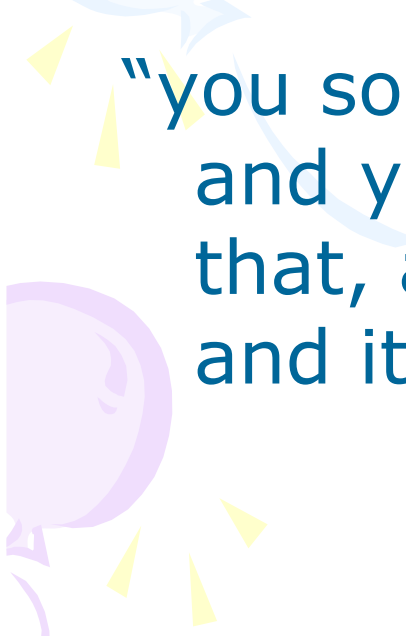




Wanting to solve problems



“you all come up with different ideas,  
putting a bit more in, taking a bit out,  
changing it ... and you can get something  
really good out of it”



“you sort of get absorbed into it, don't you,  
and you think – I want to find more about  
that, and I want to find more about that –  
and it just takes over really”



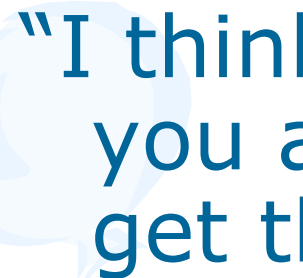
## Support

“I did it with a group of friends ... we didn't know what it was talking about, we were very confused, and once we sat down and shared ideas we got there in the end”


“ I'd print out what I'd done and [the tutor would] quickly read through it. She was really, really positive ”



## Collaboration



“I think you need to work in a group ...  
you all put your brains together to  
get the thing done”



“Listening to other people, not so  
much tutors but people on my level,  
really helped”

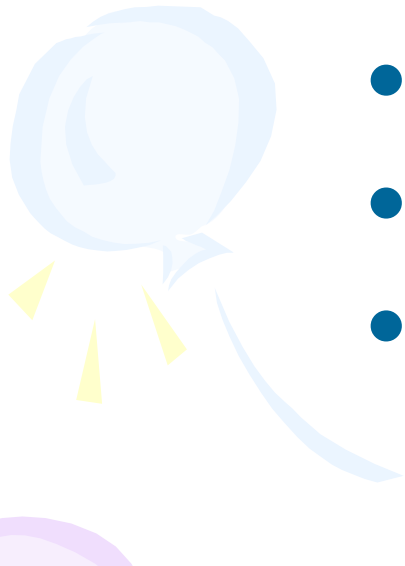


# Posters, exhibitions and alternative writing tasks



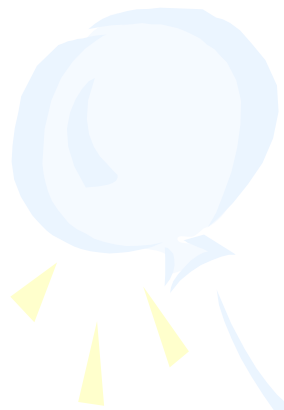


- Something different
- Require transformation
- Sense of audience
- Focus students on process
- Fun
- Product can be 'shared'
- 'Feels' creative

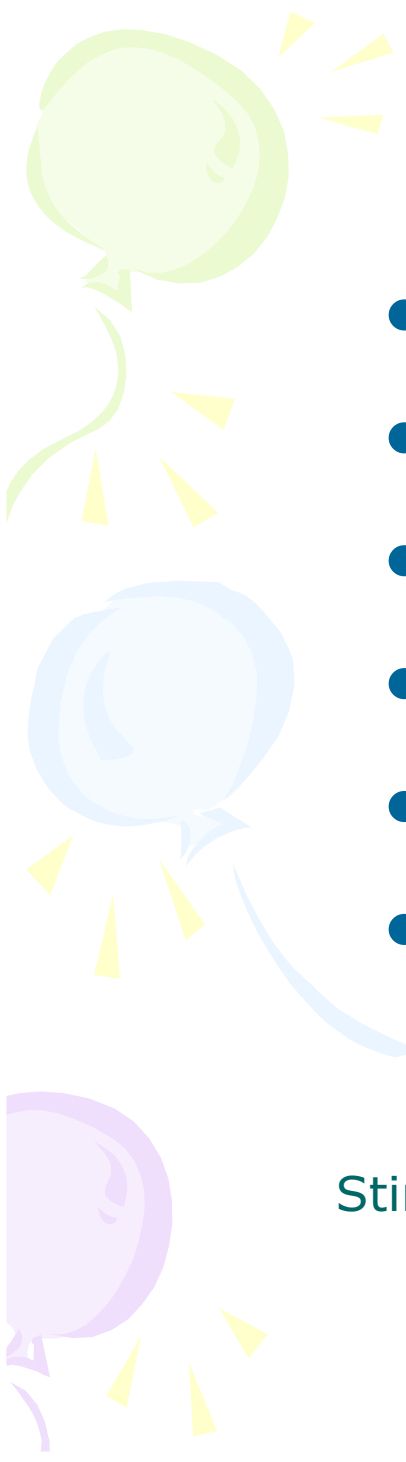


Stimulation ✓ Connection ✓ Problem-solving ?

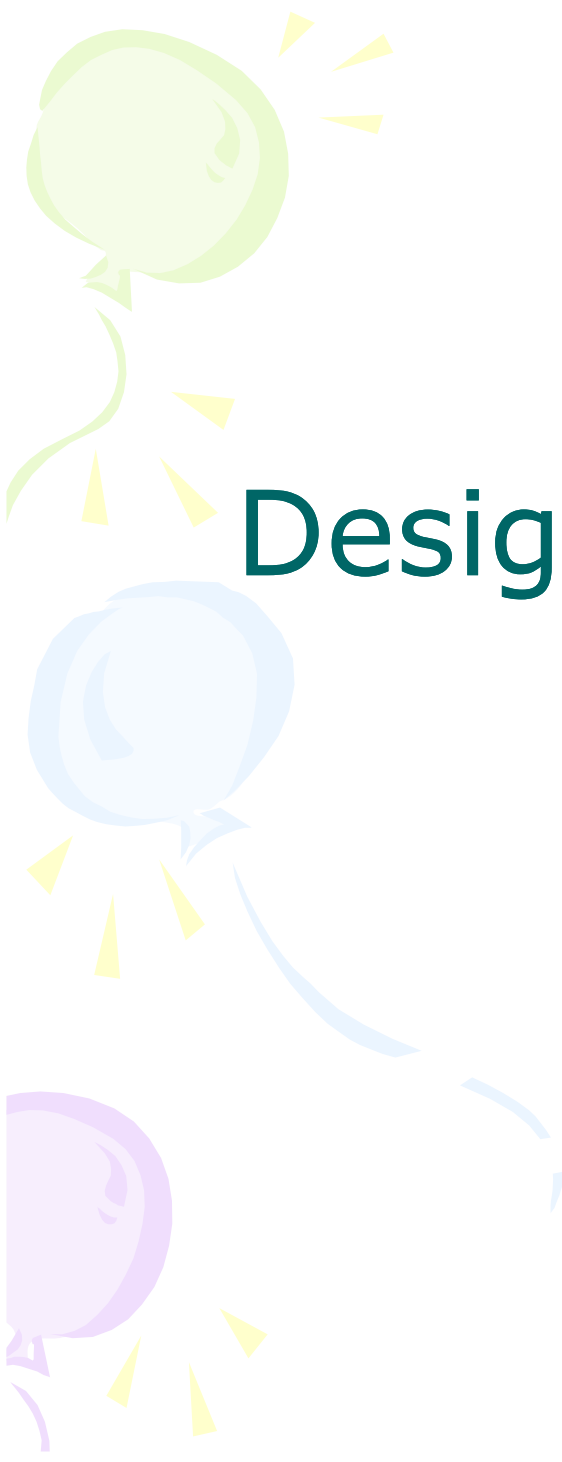




# Presentations

- 
- Something different
  - Real audience
  - Interaction
  - Promotes engagement
  - Perceived relevance
  - Requires connection

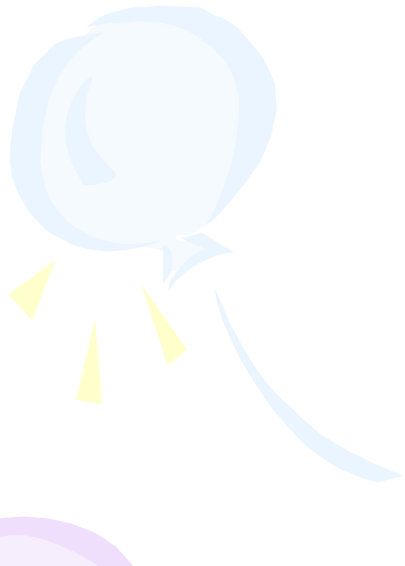
Stimulation ✓   Connection ✓   Problem-solving ?



Design tasks, case studies,  
live problems



- Something different
- Requires transformation
- Stimulates engagement
- Collaboration
- Relevance



Stimulation ✓

Connection ?

Problem-solving ✓



Think  
**RADICAL**  
Creativity!



# Keys to success??

- Having something to say
- Wanting to engage
- No single right answer
- Dialogue
- Support
- Interaction/collaboration




# References

Jackson, N et al (2005) Creativity: Can it be taught and caught? HEA Working Paper

[http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources.asp?process=full\\_record&section=generic&id=557](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources.asp?process=full_record&section=generic&id=557)





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